

Year End Edition 2020

THE WILDSIDE

A newsletter for the supporters of the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance & The Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge



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We're Open !!!

Field work continues!

Hawkwatch 2020

Agents of Discovery app now live!

ABOUT DRIWR & IWRA



The Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge (DRIWR) is located along the lower Detroit River and western shoreline of Lake Erie. Established in 2001 as the first International Wildlife Refuge in North America, it includes islands, coastal wetlands, marshes, shoals, and waterfront lands along 48 miles of shoreline. Its unique location in a large urban area allow significant opportunities for the public to experience fish, wildlife and plants in their natural habitat.

The International Wildlife Refuge Alliance (IWRA) is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization- a "Friends" organization that works to support the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in the development of the DRIWR. We invite you to become a supporter of IWRA .

Visit iwralliance.org, www.fws.gov/refuge/detroit_river and www.drhawkwatch.org for more periodic updates.

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 www.facebook.com/DetroitRiverIWR
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A Message from the Alliance Chair

Trials and Tribulations! Yes, it has been difficult, but people are now fishing on the Pier in the Refuge Gateway and walking the trails of the Humbug Marsh.

That's progress! Thanks to Wayne County, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the many partnerships involved to make this happen, you now have access to the public lands of Refuge Gateway and Humbug Marsh in Trenton, Michigan.

The John D. Dingell, Jr. Visitor Center at the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge is not yet open for public visitation due to COVID 19, but we anticipate an opening once the threat of the virus has abated. We look forward to seeing you!

Richard Micka, Chair
International Wildlife Refuge Alliance Board



Volunteer Trainings Beginning Soon!



Photo Credit: FWS

We look forward to scheduling the Volunteer Foundations training soon. We thank you for your patience as we get through 2020. We know volunteers are essential to the future of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge and the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance.

And, to be effective, properly trained and knowledgeable volunteers, we will be hosting training sessions as soon as is possible. If you are interested in joining the volunteer team, check out a number of the available positions at www.fws.gov/refuge/Detroit_River/what_we_do/get_involved.html.

From the Refuge Administrator Susan White

It is a true joy to see people at the Refuge, enjoying Refuge Gateway and Humbug Marsh. After years of blood, sweat, and tears, the vision is now a reality. I hope you agree that what you've created is a gem. This is a place where – over the years – the community has come together to fight for its protection, conduct visioning of what it could be, raise funds for its creation, reclaim nature's space by planting trees and removing invasive species, and teach each other -and learn from each other about our humanity and shared communion with the natural world. What a place this is! What a community this is!

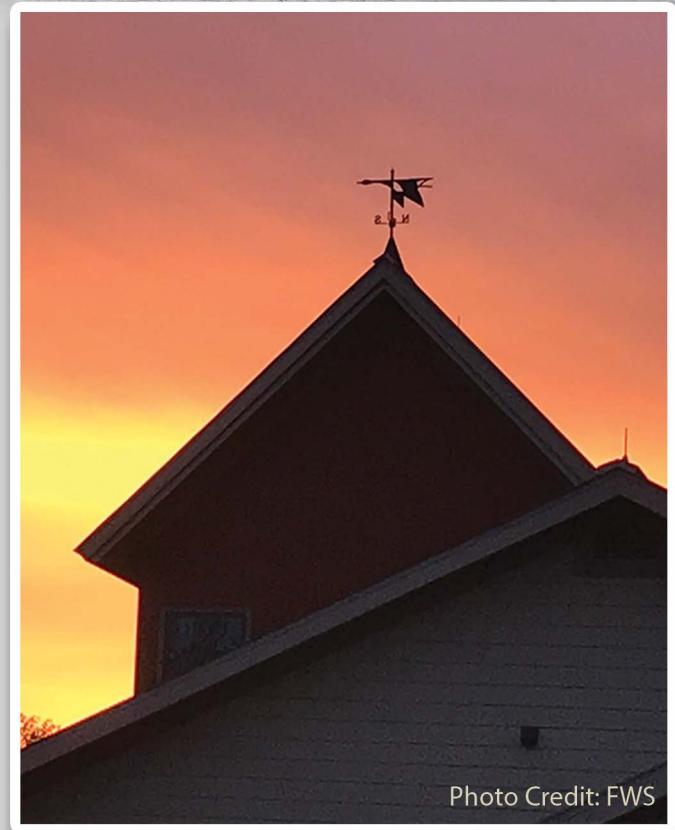


So many people and organizations have been instrumental or led the charge to protect our natural heritage and create this space for today's and future generations. There are too many to mention everyone but (in my limited time here) a few stand out as true believers and deserve a call out: Thank you John Dingell, for your vision of this refuge and the faith that we can work together to restore healthy ecosystems where everyone is welcome and can enjoy nature. Thank you Debbie Dingell for sustaining and furthering this vision, throughout time, for us all.

Thank you Dr. John Hartig for more than 14 years of dedication and passion in pulling all the puzzle pieces together to make the vision a real picture of conservation progress and a model for the world. Thanks to all the staff over the years, tirelessly dedicated to the mission and making the dream a reality while persevering through untold ups and downs with poise, professionalism, and humor. Thank you to the Friends of the Detroit River for seeing the need and organizing the community to save Humbug Marsh years ago, and continuing to support a healthy river.

Thank you to DTE Energy for being a consistently engaged and supportive neighbor and partner – championing the idea that industry can be a vital part of nature conservation. Thank you to our communities and municipal neighbors, for your unwavering belief about the beauty of Downriver and support for making green space where, 'everyone is welcome' and 'everyone is a naturalist'. And, thank you to the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance Board of Directors and Executive Director, whose conviction and unwavering support for making this dream a reality over the years have been a persistent thread for progress in even the toughest of times.

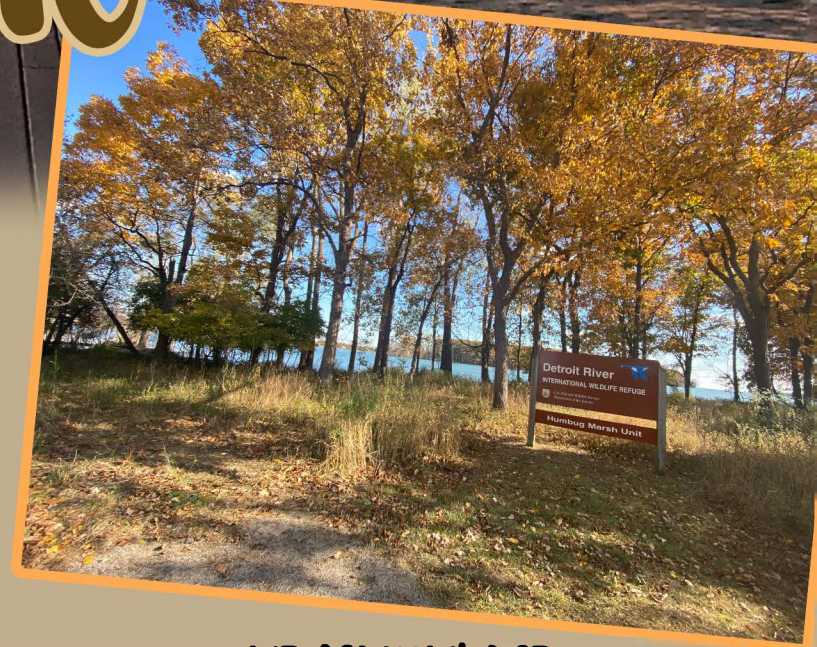
As you walk into peacefulness of the Humbug Marsh trails, or stand on the fishing pier with the river's life-giving water flowing around you, I invite you to pause, close your eyes for a moment, and take a deep breath. Share a moment of thanks to the decades of believers who knew what few could see. Acknowledge and honor the native peoples who first inhabited these lands and waters, and whose descendants continue to cherish them today. Stop for a moment to honor our own ancestors who brought us to this point. Breathe in and feel the energy of this place. For me, it is an energy like no other. It is calming and comforting like an old friend in one second, and it is exciting and invigorating for the promise of a healthy future in the next. I invite you to take it all in, and feel your own energy in it. Then.... get out and enjoy it, and keep coming back!



The Refuge Gateway, Fishing Pier and Humbug Marsh Trails are Now Open!

Welcome Back

Photo Credits: FWS



A SPECIAL THANK YOU

It is often said, and we say it often, we could not survive if it were not for the generosity of our friends in conservation. We say it often because it's true! 2020 has proved to be a year of trying times – the cancellation of events and fundraisers, learning to work remotely, finding ways to stay connected, and through it all remain positive for the future when we can open the doors of the John D. Dingell, Jr. Visitor Center to the public along with the Canvasback Corner Nature Store. There is so much more to come!

We invite you to visit and enjoy all the location of 5437 W. Jefferson Avenue, Trenton, MI has to offer! Join us Thursdays through Sundays, sun up to sun down, with no entry fees. We look forward to meeting you soon.

Rumor has it, a 34" walleye was recently caught on the fishing pier!

WE ACKNOWLEDGE

those who supported us through our online fundraisers, the Bonfire T-shirt campaign sold 170 items and supported the Nature Store, the End-of-Year campaign for the chance to win a 2-day package at the historic Grand Hotel on Michigan's majestic Mackinac Island or the handcrafted owl quilt, and for those who made reservations towards the 2020 Annual Benefit Dinner and then with kind words generously made them into donations. We sincerely Thank You all!

Field work continues!

Micahala Burke, DRIWR Biological Technician

The Detroit River-Western Lake Erie Cooperative Weed Management Area (DR-WLE CWMA) is pleased to have completed yet another season, despite the challenges and uncertainties 2020 had brought to the table. Even when confronted with these challenges, the DR-WLE CWMA strike team was able to stay on track and safely accomplish their goals established earlier in the year.

Delayed due to COVID-19, the strike team technicians were able to start the season by surveying a variety of ecosystems via hiking and kayaking. While surveying, technicians used the ArcCollector app to record invasive plant population points based on a variety of parameters established in the Midwest Invasive Species Information Network (MISIN) Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR) protocol. This protocol establishes the framework for which technicians determine plant populations' location, size, and densities. Throughout the season, they examined these populations and reflected on previous years' data to compare changes in population size and densities to determine the efficiency of previous treatments and to strategize treatments for the new season.

This year, the strike team surveyed over 25 different invasive plant species. Among them a variety of herbaceous, aquatic, and woody plants such as common and glossy buckthorn, multiflora rose, phragmites, Japanese knotweed, wild and cut-leaf teasel, autumn olive, Japanese barberry, and European frog-bit. Invasive plant species such as these can be highly aggressive in nature and can grow in thick stands or even mats on the water's surface. Consequently, these characteristics allow invasive plants to outcompete native plants that provide valuable resources for local and migrating wildlife and ultimately decrease biodiversity in an ecosystem. On the bright side, technicians were able to scout for these invasive plants across 26 different properties, covering a total of 8,800 acres! In addition, they were able to treat over 86 acres of phragmites, a highly aggressive invasive species notorious for growing in dense monocultures which often expand into a number of high-quality wetlands and shorelines. A large component of the DR-WLE CWMA's mission is to raise public awareness on how to mitigate the spread of invasive species through educational outreach.

One of the best ways to combat this issue is to make others aware and provide the tools and knowledge to everyone so that they too can help slow the spread. We all contribute to the big picture and there are some easy, simple habits you can adopt to make a difference. Routine cleaning of your hiking gear, clothing, kayak, boat, canoe, trailers, vehicles, and waders before and after visiting your favorite green space is a perfect place to start. Invasive plant seeds can often cling to these objects and surfaces, where they then go with you to your new destination and have the potential to reestablish elsewhere.

Although the fight against invasive species may be an ongoing battle, returning the next season and witnessing the ecological benefits from previous years' treatments reinforces the mission of the DR-WLE CWMA. As this season comes to an end, the DR-WLE CWMA technicians are eager to see what the following year has in store and look forward to continue improving our region's green spaces, one invasive at a time!



Alexa Blankenship sterilizing kayaks to prevent the spread of invasive plant seeds after a long day of surveying.

Photo by Tyler Dolin



Monoculture of phragmites found by technicians while out surveying in the field.

Photo by Alexa Blankenship



Kayak sitting on top of a thick mat of invasive European frog-bit.

Photo by Alexa Blankenship



Marsh Master loaded up and ready to depart for a long day of invasive plant treatments.

Photo by Michala Burke



DETROIT RIVER HAWK WATCH

On September 1st, the Detroit River Hawk Watch program began its 38th consecutive year of monitoring raptor migration at the Lake Erie Metropark! This season, we were happy to welcome back Kevin Georg for his 4th year as the lead counter at the site. The Detroit River Hawk Watch program runs every day from September 1st to November 30th and daily raptor counts are reported to the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA) Hawk Count database. This database not only holds the records of our very own Hawk Watch program, but programs held throughout the country as well! Data collected at the count site are used to help us better understand factors influencing migration, species health, and population dynamics while also promoting awareness of our region's wildlife resources.

Every fall, raptor species make their way from their breeding grounds in Canada to their overwintering parts in Mexico and South America. One can imagine how much energy it would take to complete this journey. Therefore, these majestic birds heavily depend on thermals, favorable weather conditions, and geographical features to help complete this long track to their winter home. Thermals are columns of rising air which are created when the sun shines down and warms the earth's surface. These very thermals allow migrants to gain exceptional altitude, where they are then able to cover long distances as they stream across the landscape. If you have ever looked up and seen a spiraling column of birds in the sky, you unknowingly witnessed this phenomenon first hand! Geographical features, such as large bodies of water, impact a raptor's route in migration. Raptors observed at Detroit River Hawk Watch are heavily influenced by what is referred to as a diversion line, which is a geographic or topographic feature that forces migrants to change their course of travel to avoid crossing a given area. Crossing large bodies of water, such as the Great Lakes, can be quite energy expensive; therefore, minimizing the distance crossed is one of their strategies. With the north shore of Lake Erie acting as this diversion line, raptors take advantage of the thermals produced off Canada as they travel from east to west, where they are then directed to a much smaller gap in the Detroit River corridor. Come to find out, this smaller gap happens to be where Lake Erie Metropark resides and allows every birder's dream to become a reality.

Not all raptors are alike, so one can infer that timing of migration will vary from species to species. September marks a time where large numbers of broad-winged hawks can be observed. This year by the end of September, a total of 15,645 broad-winged hawks made their way over the count site. On one day alone, a total of 6,010 broad-winged hawks made a spectacular appearance for our volunteers! As broad-winged hawk numbers seemed to dwindle, the sharp-shinned hawks made their presence known by the end of September, heading into early October. On October 8th, 554 sharp-shinned hawks were observed within an eight hour period! However, turkey vultures challenged these numbers in early October when they hit the sky soaring. In just one day, 10,904 turkey vultures were observed. Other species observed so far this season include red-tailed hawks, red-shouldered hawks, peregrine falcons, merlin, American kestrels, bald eagles, and more!

We would like to thank all of our volunteers for their continued dedication, support, and flexibility in these unprecedented times. The Detroit River Hawk Watch program was able to successfully begin yet another season while prioritizing the health and safety of our volunteers, visitors, and professional counter. We sincerely appreciate those volunteers who took the time to make all daily counts, summaries, and photography available on the Detroit River Hawk Watch Facebook page and website for everyone to enjoy and be a part of throughout the season virtually. Success of the count would also not be possible without the support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance, HMANA, and the Huron-Clinton Metroparks. We look forward to what the rest of the season has in store and hope for another 40 more!

Stay safe and keep looking up!

Bald Eagle flying over the count site
Photo by Andrew Sturgess



Bald Eagle fishing off the Detroit River.
Photo by Andrew Sturgess



Red-tailed hawk and sharp-shinned hawk
soaring together.
Photo by Andrew Sturgess



Northern Harrier cruising over the count site.
Photo by Andrew Sturgess



Red-tailed hawk curiously peering down at
the observers
Photo by Andrew Sturgess



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DETROIT RIVER INTERNATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE

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- 1 Join **Agents of Discovery**, the not-so-secret, secret agency dedicated to learning and playing outdoors to solve Challenges.
- 2 To get started, **download the FREE game and Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge Mission** to your mobile device. After downloading the app, visit **Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge** to play your **Mission**.
- 3 This game will help you **discover the great outdoors**—use the hints and clues from your surroundings to solve mysteries of nature, culture, and technology.

HELLO AGENT...EXPLORE DETROIT RIVER INTERNATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE IN A WHOLE NEW WAY!

Agents of Discovery® is an augmented reality mobile game to play and discover the world around you. Unlock hidden geo-located challenges that can only be solved through exploration and discovery.

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Photo Credit - Tom Kachelmeyer

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